

Marematha Baptist Church  
East side of Georgia Highway 49, 0.4 miles  
north of Hospital Street intersection  
Plains Vicinity  
Sumter County  
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2208

HABS  
GA,  
131-PLAIN,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MARANATHA BAPTIST CHURCH

HABS No. GA-2208

Location: East side of GA Highway 49, 0.4 miles north of intersection with Hospital Street, Plains, Sumter County, Georgia.

USGS Plains Georgia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator  
Coordinates: Zone 16, N 3548000 E 746360.

Present Owner/Occupant: Maranatha Baptist Church.

Present Use: Baptist Church.

Significance: The Carters left the Plains Baptist Church and joined Maranatha Baptist Church after returning to Plains following Jimmy Carter's presidency. Both Jimmy and Rosalynn teach Sunday School classes here when they are in town and are active members of the congregation.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1978.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The 11.40 acres on which the church was built were donated by Mrs. Young Thompson (Lilloise Lunsford) Sheffield, Mrs. James William (Charlene Sheffield) Mallard and Young Thompson Sheffield Jr. to L.E. Godwin Jr., Hugh Carter, and Frank Whitley, trustees of the Maranatha Baptist Church on December 29, 1977. Deed Book 162, page 167, Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia. Plat Book 11, page 61, at the Clerk's Office shows the dimensions of the property.
3. Contractor: Walter Rumminger, president of Northway Contractors Inc. of Greenville, South Carolina. Rumminger is the founder of a large gospel ministry in South Carolina who developed the Econo-Church method of church construction. He has erected these structures throughout the Southeast. Lennox Industries of Decatur, Georgia, supplied the climate-control system. Grading was done by the Reeves Construction Company of Americus, Georgia. Stained glass was supplied by Glass Contractors Inc. of Baconton, Georgia. The stone veneer behind the pulpit was supplied by the Georgia Marble Company of Atlanta, Georgia; lumber was supplied by the Shiver Lumber Company of Americus; shingles are from Shingles Underwriter Laboratories Inc.; and interior doors are from Southern Sash Company, Greenville, South

Carolina.<sup>1</sup>

4. Original plans and construction: Hugh Carter has the original blueprints for this building at his antique store on Main Street, Plains. No alterations have been made.
- B. Historical Context: The Maranatha Baptist Church was formed in 1977 by members of the 100-year-old Plains Baptist Church congregation who left after a series of events that occurred during Carter's presidential campaign and his first year in office. Hugh Carter, a founding member of the Maranatha congregation, devoted a chapter of his book, Cousin Beedie and Cousin Hot, to what he explained as basically a racial issue (see HABS No. GA-2212). When the underlying tension created by the question of whether or not to admit blacks intensified, twenty-nine members of the Plains Baptist Church left the congregation and worshipped together for the first time on May 22, 1977 in a vacant Lutheran church five miles south of Plains. Calling themselves the Bottsford Baptist Mission, the group grew in numbers and strength and renamed its congregation the Maranatha Baptist Church, using an Aramaic word found in First Corinthians 16:22 meaning "Our Lord cometh." The new church soon raised money to fund what was estimated to be a \$250,000 structure. The congregation worshipped in the new building for the first time December 13, 1978 and the building was dedicated on January 14, 1979.<sup>2</sup>

Although the division of the old church and the construction of the new occurred while the Carters were in Washington, D.C., many wondered which congregation the president and his wife would join when they returned to Plains. On August 7, 1977, during their first visit to Plains since the church split, the Carters attended Sunday school at the Plains Baptist Church and worship services at the Maranatha Baptist Church. The Carters attended both churches for a while, but finally joined the Maranatha Baptist Church, where they remain active. Hugh Carter leads the singing at the church and invites tourists coming into his shop on Main Street to attend his cousin's Sunday school classes. Reverend Dan Ariail has been the Maranatha pastor since 1982. On the Sundays when Jimmy and Rosalynn are in town, the church often overflows with visitors; a tour bus parked outside during a worship service is not unusual.

Maranatha Baptist Church has also become a worshipping place for many of the students and volunteers who work for Habitat for Humanity, an international religious organization that provides low-cost housing for the poor which is based in the nearby town of Americus. As the Carters noticed the regular church attendance of the Habitat workers and their charismatic leader, Millard Fuller, they became interested in the program and are now active

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<sup>1</sup> Invoices and letters pertaining to construction are kept in the files of the church clerk, Hugh Alton Carter, Plains, Georgia.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Carter, pp. 309-326.

participants.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This traditional church building was built with practicality and efficiency in mind. The ornamentation is simple and direct, such as the classical pedimented entrance porch and the subdued stained-glass windows.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This bilaterally symmetrical, rear-facing T-plan is approximately 118' from front to back and consists of an approximately 50' x 78' rectangular sanctuary section with seven bays on the north and south sides, which intersects with an approximately 40' x 96' classroom wing that is eight bays across its back/east facade.
2. Foundations: Brick on a concrete base.
3. Walls: Brick laid in running bond with concave mortar joints.
4. Structural System, framing: Concrete block with vertical masonry ties 16" on center.
5. Porches: The west facade has a covered, 8' deep entrance porch of brick that extends 32' across the center of the facade. Four 15" fluted aluminum Tuscan columns support the entablature and pediment above the porch.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is in the center of the west facade of the church block under the classical porch, and consists of double, twenty-one-panel doors set in a wood, pedimented frontispiece. The broken pediment features dentils and is supported by pilasters. Additional entrances are in the easternmost bays of the church block. These single, six-panel doors have soldier-course sills. Two additional entries are centered in each gable end of the classroom wing. These six-panel doors are recessed 3'-6" into the north and south facades.
  - b. Windows: The church block has six rectangular, 6'-6" x 3'-8"

stained-glass windows on the north and south facades. All the windows are identical, with amethyst, green, and semi-opaque, diamond-shaped panes. The glazing in the classroom wing consists of 5'-5" x 2'-5", single-light fixed windows; eight across the east facade and two each on the 23' west-facing walls on either side of the church block. These windows have white trim and rowlock sills. A 30" stained-glass rose window ornaments the center of the pediment.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The church block of this cross-gable roof is about 3' taller than the perpendicular classroom wing, so its east gable end rises about 3' above the ridge of the lower roof. The front porch is covered with a gable roof with the same slope as that over the main block. The roof throughout is covered with black asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Eaves are boxed and have a narrow fascia. A rain gutter runs along the cornice of the east facade.
- c. Tower: A 29'-0" x 7'-3" prefabricated fiberglass steeple rises from the center of the west end of the church. It consists of an octagonal lantern on a rectangular base with a hexagonal spire topped by a 4'-0" Latin cross. The rectangular base and octagonal lantern have decorative cornices and the eight 17" x 51" lights in the lantern are smaller versions of the stained-glass windows in the church itself.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The west end of the church contains a 12' x 23' narthex with small trapezoidal anterooms at either end; these house bathrooms for women (west) and men (east). The trapezoidal shape of the rooms is created by the canted rear walls of the six-bay church block. The auditorium has three groups of thirteen pews and four aisles, which lead to the altar at the east end. Two aisles run west to east along the walls of the auditorium; two inner aisles separate the three banks of pews. In the easternmost bay of the auditorium is the altar and lectern on a 8'-9"-deep raised platform with canted sides. The piano and organ are located on the east wall in partitioned areas on the north and south sides of the raised platform, respectively. A recessed rectangular area behind this platform serves as a choir. The two aisles along the exterior walls lead to two doors on either side of the sanctuary opening into two parallel halls that run west to east to the classroom wing. Directly east of the choir area, between the two parallel halls, are two narrow parallel

rooms running north to south. In the easternmost room, behind the choir, is a large baptismal font. West of the baptismal area is a utility room containing the heating and mechanical equipment. Small polygonal rooms are located on either side of the central choir, baptismal font, and utility room inside the two halls. The hall on the south side of the building leads to a large dining/meeting room and adjoining kitchen; the north hall leads to another hall that runs north to south from the recessed door on the north side of the building to the large dining/meeting room on the south. On the east side of this hall, along the rear facade of the building, there are five small classrooms. The last room on the east side of the hall to the south is the kitchen and adjoining dining/meeting room. Along the west side of the back hall, from north to south, is the pastor's office, church office, north hall leading to the auditorium, women's bathroom, nursery, and men's bathroom.

2. Stairways: Two parallel runs of three risers are on the canted sides of the platform at the east end of the church. There are also two runs of four steps in each of the polygonal rooms on each side of the choir and font. The two easternmost flights lead to the choir, running along the east wall of the sanctuary; the westernmost flights lead up to each side of the baptismal font in the narrow room behind the east wall of the auditorium.
3. Flooring: Floors are 4" concrete slab. The auditorium, raised platform, choir, and polygonal side rooms feature green wall-to-wall carpeting. The narthex has a teak mosaic parquet floor. The classrooms and offices are also covered with wall-to-wall carpet of various colors. The kitchen and adjoining dining/meeting room have sheet linoleum flooring and the bathrooms are all floored with green, hexagonal-shaped, ceramic tiles.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The east wall of the sanctuary is uncoursed ashlar. The remaining walls are gypsum wallboard painted white. The area beneath the chair rail in the hallways is covered with a textured green wallpaper, and the nursery and pastor's office are also wallpapered. The auditorium ceiling is peaked and supported by seven 7'-0" x 9'-6" exposed beams. The ceilings throughout are gypsum.
5. Doorways and doors: Two sets of paneled double doors lead from the narthex into the sanctuary. Each has a central window with yellow plastic glazing in the center and a decorative metal grid. All other doors are six-panel wood with the exception of one flush hollow-core door that leads from the south polygonal room to the utility area. The doors to the nursery and the preschool classroom have been cut in half to function as a dutch door.

6. Decorative features and trim: Throughout the sanctuary and classroom wing is a 3' high chair rail. There is also an opening between the choir and the baptismal font covered by a red curtain. The front of the font has a plexiglass panel so that when the curtain is drawn back, the congregation can observe the total immersion baptisms.
7. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The building features a central electric heating system with a blower. It is cooled by a General Electric Company central air-conditioning system. Additional window air-conditioning units cool the pastor's and secretary's offices. Louvered wood vents in each gable end of the classroom wing and the east gable ventilate the attic. Under these vents are rowlock sills.
  - b. Lighting: The auditorium is illuminated by twelve suspended fixtures, two in each bay. Two spotlights further illuminate the raised platform at the east end. Two suspended fixtures in the narthex match those in the auditorium. The hallways and classrooms are lit by fluorescent strip ceiling units.
  - c. Plumbing: The building has five bathrooms: two in the narthex anterooms have a sink and toilet, as does a small restroom in the rear of the preschool classroom north of the kitchen. A larger women's restroom in the classroom wing has two toilets and a sink; a larger men's room has two urinals, a toilet and a sink. A utility sink is next to the hot-water heater in the utility room. The series VI Model 600 fiberglass baptistery, from Glasstech Plastics, is 12'-8" x 3'-10" x 3'-8" deep. It has a sidewinder heater, model FC30 with pump mixing action. The kitchen has double sinks. There is a drinking fountain on the east wall of the back hall between the kitchen and the preschool room; a spigot on the exterior south wall is used for watering the lawn and bushes.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church faces west onto Georgia Highway 45, set back about 300' from the road. Constructed in an old pecan grove, many of the nut-bearing trees still surround the church. An asphalt parking lot occupies the north side of the building. Concrete walks lead from the parking lot to the main entry and the side entrance in the classroom wing. Behind the church is a metal swingset.
2. Outbuilding: A corrugated-metal shed with a gable roof, located behind the church, is used for storing lawn equipment and pecans.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: Hugh Carter has original blueprints at his antique store on Main Street, Plains.
- B. Interviews:  
  
HUGH Carter, church secretary, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, Plains, Ga., July 1989.
- C. Bibliography:
  - 1. Primary and unpublished sources:  
  
Deed Books and Plat Books, Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.  
  
Builder's specifications, Maranatha Baptist Church, Plains, Georgia.
  - 2. Secondary and published sources:  
  
Carter, Hugh, Cousin Beedie and Cousin Hot, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1978. 309-326.

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